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AUTHOR Claypool, Sharon H.
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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the relationship between teacher writing apprehension and the uses of writing in various classrooms. Subjects were 192 secondary school teachers who completed a writing apprehension measure and a questionnaire that elicited information about their teaching experience, subject and grade level taught, and the number, length, variety, and basis of writing assignments they made per year. The questionnaire also asked teachers to indicate who they thought was responsible for teaching writing. Results showed that teachers across the curriculum who were highly apprehensive about writing assigned fewer writing tasks than did teachers who were less apprehensive. However, teachers in all disciplines reported an awareness that writing is the responsibility of all teachers. (A copy of the survey form is appended.) (FL)

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Teacher Writing Apprehension: Does It Affect
Writing Assignments Across the Curriculum?

Sharon H. Claypool
Northern Kentucky University

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Teacher Writing Apprehension: Does It Affect
Writing Assignments Across the Curriculum?

Many journal articles and newly instituted writing workshops for faculty across the curriculum attest to the recent emphasis on writing in all disciplines. The act of writing is beginning to be recognized as a tool to develop greater student understanding in the subject areas. It has also been noted that writing apprehension can result in avoidance of writing, and it is possible that this avoidance of writing might cause teachers to avoid the use of writing as a teaching tool. This study investigates the relationship between teacher writing apprehension and the use of writing in the classroom.

The nature of writing apprehension and its relationship to other personality constructs has been of recent interest to researchers, and an instrument has been developed which allows the measurement of writing apprehension (Daly & Miller, 1975). Recent studies have shown that writing anxiety predicts choice of college major and profession (Daly & Shamo, 1978; Daly & Shamo, 1976) with high apprehensives 1) choosing majors and professions they perceive to be low in writing requirements, and 2) tending to view all majors and professions as less desirable than they are viewed by low apprehensives. From this research, it would seem probable that teachers, overall, are less apprehensive about writing than the general public, but that the more apprehensive teachers have chosen subject matter (such as math or science) they perceive to be lower in writing requirements. Writing apprehension has also been found to have a significant correlation with oral communication apprehension (Daly & Wilson, 1980).

While working with students in a writing anxiety workshop,

Martin Bloom (1979) observed that writing apprehension is a very weak form of pathological behavior, causing varying degrees of dysfunctionality, but is self-limiting and situation-specific. He determined that it is the teacher rather than the pathologist who can help the writer resolve the problem by teaching specific writing skills.

Recent studies have shown that faculty writing apprehension can be lessened considerably through participation in writing courses, workshops, or seminars (Weiss & Peich, 1980; King, 1980). Such research also indicates that increased experience with writing lessens anxiety whether based on teacher-centered instruction or peer-centered instruction, though the latter lessens anxiety at a faster rate (Fox, 1980). Those who have conducted faculty writing workshops report that participants have attested to success in increased use of writing in their classes, improved attitudes and success of their students, and a desire to make more use of writing as a learning device (Raimes, 1979; Freisinger, 1980).

Articles in many journals of the basic disciplines are attempting to demonstrate that writing is a valuable instrument with which to promote the learning process, because it exercises the process of thinking (Emig, 1977; Fulwiler & Jones, 1979; Irmischer, 1979; Fulwiler, 1980), encourages the techniques of scientific observation (Stinson, 1978), enables students to analyse, interpret, and evaluate the information with which they are working (Beyer, 1980; Ventre, 1979), clarifies hazy issues, and reinforces learning (Fulwiler, 1978). A recent experiment at West Chester State College has found that written concepts in the content areas were learned with more clarity than non-written concepts, and that amounts of knowledge gained were higher in classes using writing as a learning tool (Weiss & Walters, 1980).

Advice on how teachers in the various disciplines are using writing in their classes to enhance subject matter learning can be found in abundance (Lehr, 1980; Odell, 1980; Marcus, 1980; Raimes, 1979; Delmar, 1978; Maxwell & Judy, 1978; Ross & Jarosz, 1978). Journals kept in a chemistry class demonstrated that students wrote to clarify the material for themselves, and, as a result, did not need the teacher to explain the material over and over (Wotring, 1980). Writing in mathematics is proposed as a diagnostic tool through which teachers can discover important misconceptions students may hold about the relationships of concepts that are never revealed by achievement tests (Geeslin, 1977). Once misconceptions are identified, the teacher has a basis for further instruction. Since composing is a sustained activity of discovering and stating relationships, all instructors should use writing as a learning instrument, and not merely as a vehicle to display students' knowledge (Van Nostrand, 1979). Combining composition with interdisciplinary studies has the additional advantage of providing subject matter for essays, and writing and reading skills will develop at the same time as content learning is increased (Scheffler, 1980). A semester-long interdisciplinary faculty writing seminar at Hunter College demonstrated to the English faculty that bringing subject matter into the composition class is an important step toward moving students from personal writing to academic writing (Raimes, 1979).

A 1978 study conducted in Central Florida high schools found that while teachers acknowledged the importance of writing and believed that it should be used more often, most assign their students no more than twelve writing assignments per year. From a survey of 446 of these teachers' students, the researcher determined that revision and outlining skills are

seldom used or taught, even though students themselves want to improve their writing skills (McGee, 1978). A 1974 California survey of teachers in grades K-12 found that while 87% of the 39 elementary teachers gave 13 or more writing assignments per year, only 60% of the 35 junior high teachers and 39% of the 18 high school teachers did so (Donlan, 1974).

Hypothesis

In view of this research and the repeated testimony to the value of writing in the content area, it appears that additional research is needed on the use teachers make of writing in their classes and on factors that might impede that use. It is hypothesized that teachers across the curriculum who are highly apprehensive about writing assign fewer writing tasks than do low apprehensive teachers.

Subjects

Subjects used in this study were experienced teachers in the major disciplines of eight selected high schools, two parochial and six public, in Kenton, Boone, and Campbell counties of Kentucky. These schools represent several socio-economic levels of the population of the area. Of 383 teachers invited to participate in the study, 202 returned usable questionnaires (a 52% return). Of the 202 processed, 10 had not stated the exact number of assignments made per year, and were not included in any computations which required that data.

Years of teaching experience ranged from 1 to 44 with a mean of 12.9 years. Respondents included 60 teachers of language arts, 29 of social studies, 53 of math and science, and 60 of applied arts and sciences. Three teachers reported writing assignments for 7th grade, 2 for 8th, 31 for 9th, 49 for 10th, 46 for 11th, and 40 for 12th. Thirty-one teachers

indicated a range of grades (e.g., 10th through 12th grades) in which they made writing assignments.

Instruments

Subjects were asked to complete a survey questionnaire based on the one developed by Donlan (1974) seeking information on teaching experience, subject and grade level taught, and the number, length, variety, and basis for writing assignments made per year. Teachers were also asked who was responsible for the teaching of writing (see Illustration 1). Writing assignments were defined as those "which require students to compose at least a few sentences." In addition, subjects were asked to complete the twenty-item version of the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test (1975) developed for use with adults. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the study was included, and the packets were distributed and collected through the high school principals' offices.

Results

In order to test the hypothesis, items of the Writing Apprehension Test (WA) were scored first and mean and standard deviation for the entire responding group were calculated ($\bar{X}_{WA}=45.82$; $sd=13.67$). Low apprehensive subjects were defined as those scoring one standard deviation below the mean ($WA \leq 31$) and high apprehensives were defined as those scoring one standard deviation above the mean ($WA \geq 60$). Thirty-four of the 202 subjects were classified as low apprehensives (3 of these did not specify the number of writing assignments given) and 30 were classified as high apprehensives (1 of these did not specify the number of writing assignments). A mean for the number of assignments given each year (NA) was computed for each group (for the 31 low apprehensives, $\bar{X}_{NA}=19.9$, for the 29 high

apprehensive subjects, $\bar{x}_{NA}=7.0$). The two means of 19.9 and 7.0 were compared using the t-test for independent groups and it was found that a significant difference between the two means existed ($t=3.44$; $p<.001$, $df=58$). The null hypothesis of no difference between the two means was rejected, and it was concluded that high apprehensive subjects assigned significantly fewer writing assignments per year than low apprehensives (see Table 1).

Table 1

T-Test Comparing Number of Writing Assignments Given by
Low Apprehensives and High Apprehensives

Variable	Mean	T Value	Degrees of Freedom
Assignments			
Low Apprehensives ($WA \leq 31$, $n=31$)	19.9	3.44*	58
High Apprehensives ($WA \geq 60$, $n=29$)	7.0		

* $p < .001$

In order to take into account the nature of different subject matter, the $\bar{x}_{NA}$ of high and low apprehensive teachers within each discipline was compared to the $\bar{x}_{NA}$ of all teachers in that discipline. In social studies, the $\bar{x}_{NA}$ for all teachers was 14.3, for high apprehensives, 5.0, and for low apprehensives, 22.6. For math and science teachers, $\bar{x}_{NA}$ for all teachers was 10.9, for high apprehensives, 7.8, and for low apprehensives, 16.3. For applied arts and sciences teachers, $\bar{x}_{NA}$ for all teachers was 8.5, for high apprehensives, 4.9, and for low apprehensives, 10.2. Among language arts teachers, however, the differences were smaller. $\bar{x}_{NA}$ for all language arts teachers was 23.5, for high apprehensives, 15.0,

and for low apprehensives, 22.9. This difference between the pattern of writing assignments of the language arts teachers and teachers of other disciplines is perhaps explained by the lower levels of writing apprehension of language arts teachers. The mean writing apprehension score ($\bar{x}_{WA}$) of all subjects was 45.8. Compared by discipline, the scores suggest that language arts teachers are less apprehensive about writing than other teachers. $\bar{x}_{WA}$ of language arts teachers was 38.1, of social studies teachers, 44.0, of math and science teachers, 52.0, and of teachers of applied arts and sciences, 48.9 (see Table 2).

Table 2
Assignments Per Year by Subject Area Taught

Subject Area Taught	$\bar{x}_{WA}^*$ All Subjects	$\bar{x}_{NA}^{**}$	$\bar{x}_{NA}^{**}$ for High Appre- hensives	$\bar{x}_{NA}^{**}$ for Low Appre- hensives
Language Arts	38.1	23.5	15.0	22.9
Social Studies	44.0	14.3	5.0	22.6
Math & Science	52.0	10.9	7.8	16.3
Applied Arts & Sciences	48.9	8.5	4.9	10.2
ALL DISCIPLINES	45.8	14.3	7.0	19.9

* $\bar{x}_{WA}$ = mean score on Writing Apprehension Test

** $\bar{x}_{NA}$ = mean number of assignments per year

For further testing of the hypothesis, the Pearson r correlation coefficient for writing apprehension with number of assignments given was computed for the entire group ($r = -.2801$; $p < .001$, $df = 190$), for language arts teachers ($r = -.0693$; not significant at $p < .05$, $df = 53$), for social studies teachers ($r = -.2129$; not significant at $p < .05$, $df = 25$), for math and science teachers ($r = -.2721$; $p < .026$, $df = 50$), and for teachers of applied

arts and sciences ($r = -.2274$; $p < .043$, $df = 56$). The negative correlations suggest a tendency towards a decrease in number of writing assignments given as writing apprehension increases. However, the limited magnitude of the correlation coefficients point to a need for additional research on this question.

The survey yielded other interesting data. When asked the types of writing they assigned (given choices of narration, exposition, argumentation, reporting, and "other"), 17 reported assigning no writing, 73 only one type, 49 two types, 35 three types, 17 four types, and 11 five types. When asked the basis for assigning writing (given choices of "a summary of material covered," "an extension of material covered in class," "a substitute for what cannot be covered in class," and "other") 17 did not assign writing, 95 used only one basis for assigning writing, 52 used two, 28 used three, and 10 used four. Of the 17 teachers who did not assign writing, 9 were teachers of math and 1 each taught art, typing, drafting, music, or general business. Teachers of these courses traditionally do not assign writing, but some teachers of these subjects use writing assignments for reporting on subject matter not covered in class. A teacher of biology, one of history, and one of psychology also reported assigning no writing.

While 131 (65%) of the teachers surveyed said that teaching writing is the responsibility of all teachers, only 73 (36%) assign 12 or more writing tasks per year. Of the 73, 39 were language arts teachers. This meant that 16 (41%) of the language arts teachers assigned fewer than 12 writing tasks per year.

Discussion

Analysis of the data supports the hypothesis that teachers across the curriculum who are highly apprehensive about writing assign

fewer writing tasks than do low apprehensive teachers, whatever the reasons. The mean number of assignments per year for all teachers ($n=192$) was 14.3. However, low apprehensives ($n=31$) gave 19.9 assignments and high apprehensives ($n=29$) gave only 7.0 assignments per year. Within each discipline, this pattern was repeated, and low apprehensive teachers of social studies, math and science, and applied arts and sciences assigned 2 to 4 times the number of writing tasks per year when compared to high apprehensives of those disciplines. Application of the Pearson r correlation coefficient on writing apprehension by assignments per year did not yield significant results within every discipline, perhaps because of the small numbers of assignments given each year by many teachers. However, the important findings of this study lie in the t results which show that the number of assignments made by low apprehensives is significantly higher than the number made by high apprehensives.

Teachers reported an awareness that writing is the responsibility of teachers across the curriculum, but it is evident from the data that there is a need for increased use of writing and a greater variety of writing tasks. The findings of this study indicate that measures need to be taken to lower the writing anxiety of teachers while encouraging them to make greater use of writing in their classrooms. The previously mentioned successes of writing workshops across the curriculum provide direction to administrators and teachers. Continued research on factors that might contribute to the writing apprehension of teachers and the use they make of writing in their classrooms is needed to encourage the use of writing as a tool for teaching.

TEACHER SURVEY ON WRITING AND WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Personal information:

- _____ 1. The grade level you teach. (If you teach more than one grade level, select one level to be the basis for this survey.)
- _____ 2. The subject you teach. (If you teach more than one subject, select one subject to be the basis for this survey.)
- _____ 3. Years of teaching experience. (Exclude student teaching.)

Please respond to the following questions by placing check marks in the appropriate blanks. Limit yourself to (1) one grade level, (2) one subject, and (3) one intact classroom of students. Also, exclude essay examinations and answers to questions when defining writing assignments.

1. How long are the writing assignments you give your students? (Check as many blanks as appropriate.)

- _____ a. under 100 words
_____ b. between 100 and 300 words
_____ c. between 300 and 500 words
_____ d. between 500 and 1500 words
_____ e. over 1500 words

2. Over a period of a school year, how many writing assignments which require students to compose at least a few sentences do you give? (Exclude fill-in-the-blank exercises, dictation exercises, and short-answer exercises. Check only one blank.)

- | | |
|------------|--|
| _____ a. 1 | _____ f. 6 |
| _____ b. 2 | _____ g. 7 |
| _____ c. 3 | _____ h. 8 |
| _____ d. 4 | _____ i. 9 |
| _____ e. 5 | _____ j. other (please specify number) |

3. What types of writing do you assign? (Check as many blanks as appropriate.)

- _____ a. narration (telling stories, anecdotes, personal experiences)
_____ b. exposition (explaining)
_____ c. argumentation
_____ d. reporting
_____ e. other (please specify)

4. What is the basis for assigning writing? (Check as many blanks as appropriate.)

- _____ a. a summary of what has been covered in class
_____ b. an extension and/or exposition of what has been covered in class
_____ c. a substitute for what cannot be covered in class
_____ d. other (please specify)

5. The teaching of writing should be the responsibility of

- _____ a. the English teacher
_____ b. the content area teacher
_____ c. college or university personnel
_____ d. other (please specify)

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